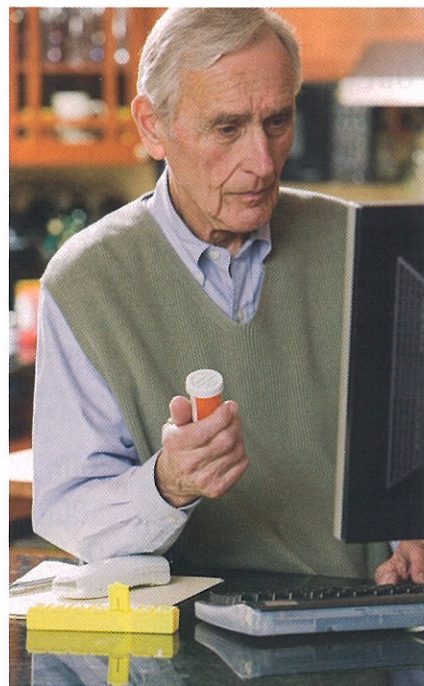


*Public Health

Chronic Care Made Easier

Taking Action on Many Fronts to Make a Difference

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Ever wonder if your Alzheimer's patient and her husband follow the treatment plan you suggested after they leave your office? Ever ask your staff to make a referral for your elderly female patient who is losing weight to a meal program for seniors, knowing it may be a difficult task for a very busy staff person? Ever wish there were more supports in the community to help provide services and monitor the health status of your frail diabetic once he/she leaves the office?

Based on national prevalence rates, one in two San Diegans has one or more chronic conditions and accounts for 83 percent of our local healthcare dollars (1). With the "age wave," it is predicted that persons 60 years plus with chronic conditions will increase 69 percent between 2005 and 2020 (2).

A physician survey by *Mathematica* shows that they are dissatisfied with current health policies, including public reimbursement (3). And while 54 percent reported being "very satisfied" with care for general patients, only 38 percent re-

ported this for patients with chronic conditions. The physicians in the study cited lack of training in several important areas, such as coordination of in-home and community services, patient education on chronic illness, managing psychological and social aspects of chronic care, providing effective nutritional guidance, and managing chronic pain.

The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, in conjunction with its many community partners, is taking action on many fronts to make a difference in chronic care delivery by supporting physicians and patients with prevention, education, and communication initiatives. Funding for these various projects comes from a variety of federal, state, local, and foundation resources. The success depends on all of us, but most importantly, support from the physician is crucial.


Team San Diego is a joint project between the County's Long Term Care Integration Project, University of California at San Diego (UCSD) Extended Studies, and Mark Meiners, PhD, at George Mason University. This initiative is preparing to launch its online training for community health and social service providers in July 2008 through UCSD Extension Summer courses. The eight one-hour, online modules are designed to prepare providers of mutual patients with chronic care needs to create a "virtual team" around each patient, in support of the primary care physician.

After completing the eight modules, a six-hour, in-class training will put the new skills into action as providers come face to face, by neighborhood, for team building and development of a communication protocol. The goal is to improve care coordination across settings and providers and increase patient engagement to become active members of that team. An introductory module is designed for physicians to present the business case on

the advantages to your practice and how to support your office staff in participating in this training.

The full training will provide health and social service providers with basic information on working successfully with elderly and disabled persons, how to create a "team" when no one has time to be in the same room for each patient, how to see diversity as opportunity for developing professional relationships, legal and ethical issues with sharing information among team members, and tools and techniques for empowering patients to manage their own care better through taking increased responsibility.

Some of these tools will include sample personal health records, medication lists, transition checklists, and training on use of the county's rich resource databank on www.sandiego.networkofcare.org/aging, where you can find aging and disabled community resources, a large bank of healthcare literature, a "virtual" long-term care options counselor, fall prevention safety tools, and more. To receive information or sign up for the introductory module (1 CME), call Jackie Kuhn at (858) 964-1059.

Other county initiatives will be described in more detail in future articles and include preventing diabetes in Hispanic elderly, falls prevention, childhood and elderly obesity programs, smoking cessation, feeling fit clubs for the elderly, chronic care self-management (Stanford Model) training, oral health, and Medicare senior risk reduction. 

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: Dr. Wooten is San Diego County's public health officer. Ms. Greb is a retired licensed clinical social worker.

RESOURCES:

- 1) Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2001
- 2) Department of Rehabilitation, Laurie Dickinson, December 2007
- 3) National Public Engagement Campaign on Chronic Illness - Physician Survey, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. 2001